Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2020

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Centres are thanked for choosing Pearson Edexcel as their International GCSE English Literature provider. We very much hope that both our candidates and centres are delighted with their results.

Introduction

The November 2020 series was successful. Both papers, 4ET1/01 and the regional paper 4ET1/01R, performed well and were very similar in performance to previous series. There were no errors in the papers, no erratum notices and there were no enquiries from centres following the examinations. Positive feedback has been received from examiners and the range of responses received were a pleasure to read. Centres are once again congratulated on preparing their candidates so well, especially during this very challenging year.

There are three sections in this examination paper. In Section A, candidates are presented with an unseen poem and answer a question based on it (20 marks). In Section B, Anthology Poetry, candidates can choose either Question 2, which has two named poems or Question 3, in which one poem is named and the candidate chooses a suitable poem to discuss with it (30 marks). For Section C, Modern Prose, candidates choose to respond to one of two questions based on the prose text that they have studied (40 marks). The total mark for this paper is 90.

This report will provide feedback on both the 4ET1/01 (Main) and 4ET1/01R (Regional) papers. Key points are relevant to both papers.

Section A: Unseen Poetry

Section A assesses AO2 (analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects).

4ET1/01
Question 1 Unseen Poem: *Friday* by Dennis O'Driscoll.
Question: Explore how the writer presents a journey home in this poem.

The unseen poem was *Friday* by Dennis O'Driscoll. Students were asked to explore how the writer presents a journey home. The performance of the question was as intended and responses were typical of previous series.

A full range of marks was awarded, with many in Level 3. There were some sustained responses, but few gained a mark in Level 5, due to lack of coverage or not enough close analysis of language, form and structure. There were a number of candidates who only provided 'some' detail (Level 2), but there were very few nil returns.

On the whole, the responses were focussed. There was clear evidence that the poem had been understood and candidates responded thoughtfully; however, some relied too heavily on the glossary. A number of more confident candidates noted the irony about the sheep being (un)leashed and how they were shearing the fields. A few noted how 'the poem appeared to speed up' as it neared the end and there was recognition of the journey in the poem from leaving work to arriving home. There were some alternative interpretations of

the 'armed guard', with some suggesting military links and even soldiers returning from war. Where points were well argued, and supported with relevant evidence, marks were awarded. Many considered how the trees appeared to guard (protect) the speaker and the weekend spent at home. Several commented on the excitement felt in the poem and the way the countryside cleansed and revitalised the speaker.

Structure, particularly that of the first verse, was commented on and some considered the use of enjambement.

One examiner commented that there was a 'refreshing lack of highly technical terms or too much 'feature spotting', which made the responses appear fresher, more spontaneous and confident'.

4ET1/01R
Question 1 Unseen Poem: *To Our Daughter* by Jennifer Armitage.
Question: Explore how the writer presents the parent's thoughts about the daughter in this poem.

Similar to the main paper, the performance of the question was as intended and responses were typical of previous series.

A range of marks was awarded, mostly in Level 3. There were some sustained responses and those achieving of Level 5. Most candidates gained marks in Levels 3 and 4, but were prevented from reaching the top level due to lack of coverage or not enough close analysis of language, form and structure. There were just four candidates who only provided 'some' detail (Level 2), but there were no nil returns or candidates gaining a mark in Level 1.

Responses were generally focussed. There was clear evidence that the poem had been understood and most candidates responded thoughtfully. Most candidates made comments about the proud parent describing her daughter as 'beautiful', but some found the descriptions of 'Blossom like balloons' and the birds, 'pigeons like eagles' more complicated and those who did understand them were more successful overall. Some candidates identified the use of hyperbole and similes, whilst others did not consider all of the poem. Most candidates made some comment in relation to structure.

For both papers, the key areas to consider for future series remain the same. When responding to the Unseen Poetry, Section A, candidates should try to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of the poem
- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure and try to suggest why this may have been used
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- comment on all areas of the poem, not just the first few lines
- use short quotations and avoid copying large areas of the poem.

Section B: Anthology Poetry

Both Anthology questions assess AO2 (analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects) and AO3 (explore links and connections between texts).

It was good to see almost equal balance of response to the Anthology poetry Questions 2 and 3 on both papers.

4ET1/01
Question 2: Compare how the writers present isolation in *Hide and Seek* and *War Photographer*.

All candidates responded to the theme of isolation with confidence, some developing the idea further as one being self-imposed and the other quite accidental when the game had gone wrong. There were comments on the fact that one was from a child's point of view and the other an adult's and how that influenced the overall effect on the reader. Some candidates even homed in on the comments about children in *War Photographer* and used those to further support the idea of isolation.

There was comment on the structure and its importance and some detailed exploration of language, especially that in *Hide and Seek*. Most candidates consciously compared and contrasted the poems and, on the whole, the responses were balanced.

There was, as Section A, less feature spotting and responses appeared fresher and more 'natural' in their interpretations. There were some very thoughtful comments on the cruelty of isolation. Many candidates appeared to be more secure in their responses to *Hide and Seek*.

Question 3: Compare the ways the writers present recollections of the past in *Piano* and one other poem.

Many candidates chose *Poem at Thirty-nine* as the companion text, but some opted for other poems such as: *Half-past Two*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *My Last Duchess* and, perhaps less successfully, *Remember*. A very small number of candidates compared with *War Photographer* and one candidate compared *If-* with *Piano*. Unfortunately, neither choice really worked, and the response(s) were more an analysis of two separate texts rather than a comparative response.

Those who compared with *Poem at Thirty-nine* commented on the childhood memories of both parents. A few of the more confident candidates noted that the *Piano* was a snapshot in time, whereas *Poem at Thirty-nine* looked over a wider expanse of time. Differences in structure was noted, such as the song-like regular structure and rhythm of *Piano* to the more free-style 'flow of memories' of *Poem at Thirty-nine*.

Comments were often thoughtful and, as with Question 1, the lack of highly sophisticated terminology lent itself to more spontaneous and personal interpretations.

In comparison with previous series, performance is similar. Candidates approached questions with enthusiasm and attempted to comment on all areas of the assessment objectives. There were some less successful responses and a very small number of rubric infringements (writing about just one poem), but this is not unusual to see.

4ET1/01R
Question 2: Compare how the writers present a sense of wonder in *Blessing* and *The Tyger*.

All candidates responded to the sense of wonder presented in the poems. There were some confident comments, such as how *The Tyger* leaves us in awe of God's creation and how in *Blessing* the sense of wonder is created by man and the breaking of a water pipe. When writing about *Blessing*, some commented on the use of onomatopoeia and alliteration, but few commented on the use of metallic imagery. Responses to *The Tyger* often considered the imagery of the tiger, but very few commented about the significance of the blacksmith's tools. All candidates considered some structure, some more successfully than others.

Question 3: Compare the ways the writers present people who want control in *My Last Duchess* and one other poem.

Some candidates chose *La Belle Dame sans Merci* as the companion text, but some opted other poems such as *Half-past Two*, *If-* or *Piano*. The majority of responses gained marks in Levels 4 and 5.

Those who compared with *La Belle Dame sans Merci* considered how the maiden was powerful over the knight and how one poem featured a controlling male whilst the other featured a controlling woman.

Comments were thoughtful and sometimes assured.

In summary and as noted in previous series, when responding to Section B, candidates should try to:

- focus on the question
- refer to form and structure
- give examples of language and explain their effect on the reader
- provide a balanced response – giving each poem equal treatment
- compare meanings and examples of language and structure.

Please do remember that context is *not* assessed in this part of the paper, but may be included if it is relevant to the question and supports the point being made.

Section C: Modern Prose

Section C assesses AO1 (knowledge and understanding of the text) and AO4 (context). All questions appeared to work well and as intended. As in previous series and similar to the main sister 'R' paper, the most popular text choice was *Of Mice and Men* with *To Kill a*

Mockingbird second most popular. On the main paper, there were just a small number of responses to *The Whale Rider* and just one on the R paper (Maori culture and traditions, that gained full marks for an impressive response). There were few responses on the main paper for *The Joy Luck Club* and *Things Fall Apart*, but no responses for the R paper. The least popular text remains *The Joy Luck Club*. A number of candidates gained marks in Level 4 and Level 5. There were some thoughtful, insightful and perceptive responses produced for most questions and, once again, a full range of marks was awarded.

There were some weaker responses to *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, often due to the brevity of the response or not including enough examples from the novel.

The very small number of candidates who responded to Ihimaera's *The Whale* Rider, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* were mostly very successful when applying both AO3 (knowledge and understanding of the text) and AO4 (context). The answers produced for these novels often resulted in some very perceptive and skilful responses supported with a range of quotations.

Text: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 4: In what ways is the Radley family important in the novel?

These responses showed the candidates had at least a sound knowledge of the text. Some linked the character of Boo to prejudice, fear, 'otherness' and abuse. Some candidates noted the hypocrisy of the father and the older brother. Episodes of Boo's interaction with the children were commented upon and some of the more secure candidates noted how Scout's maturity was reflected in the way she related to Arthur Radley towards the end of the novel. Less able candidates simply noted the little things Boo tried to do to the children.

Question 5: Discuss the theme of unhappiness in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The responses ranged from a list of the more obvious episodes: Tom's trial, Mayella's situation. Some commented on how it was the prejudice and narrow-mindedness of the town that caused the overall unhappiness. Overall, there was clear evidence of at least sound knowledge and understanding of the text, with many displaying a thorough knowledge of the text and its themes.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 4: Discuss the theme of fear in To Kill a Mockingbird.

Question 5: Explore the character of Mayella Ewell in the novel.

There were just six responses to these questions (three of each). All Question 4s gained marks in Level 5 and for Question 4 there was one Level 1, one Level 3 and one Level 5 – demonstrating the full range and accessibility of the question. The candidates were, on the

whole, very able and wrote a great deal in response to the chosen question. Most integrated contextual points and provided a wide range of evidence from the novel.

Text: *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 6: In what ways is Slim important in *Of Mice and Men*?

Candidates showed a sound and often a deeper knowledge of the text when exploring the importance of Slim in the novel. The responses ranged from fairly straightforward comments on incidents directly involving Slim, from the shooting of Candy's dog to Lennie's death. Many noted how fellow ranch hands sought his advice and how he commanded respect, even from Curley.

Question 7: Explore the theme of loss in the novel.

The candidates who attempted this response responded with varying depths of understanding of the text. The most straightforward discussed how Lennie lost his animals and pets and some more successful candidates commented on the loss of Aunt Clara and how George lost his dream after Lennie's death. More confident responses included Curley's wife's loss of dreams and freedom or that the American Dream was doomed to be lost by all the characters. Loss of friendship was another strand, as was the loss of hope for a better future. Some only considered loss as a euphemism for death, whereas others considered the loss of the American Dream, independence and financial stability due to the Depression.

Responses were often sensitive and revealed a knowledge of text themes and characters.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 6: Explore the theme of suffering in *Of Mice and Men.*

Question 7: Discuss the relationship between George and Lennie.

The majority of candidates showed at least a sound knowledge of the text. The responses ranged from fairly straightforward Point Evidence Explain comments through to the thoughtful and thorough, with a few assured. Just one response was given a mark in Level 2.

When exploring the theme of suffering in the novel, most considered how Candy suffered the loss of his dog and how George and Lennie suffered the loss of their dream and, ultimately, George's suffering about the loss of Lennie at the end of the novel.

When discussing the relationship between George and Lennie, most considered key episodes from throughout the novel and explored how George was like a father-figure to his companion.

Text: *The Whale* Rider, Witi Ihimaera

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 8: Explore one character who, in your opinion, has great power in *The Whale Rider.*

Question 9: In what ways is change important in the novel?

There were very few responses to this text and most, as was expected for Question 8, considered either Kahu, Koro or Nana Flowers to have power. Most candidates displayed a sound to thorough knowledge and understanding of the novel. The small number of responses make comparison difficult, but questions worked as intended and gave candidates an opportunity to write about the novel with confidence.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 8: In what ways is Kahu's father, Porourangi, important in the novel?

Question 9: Discuss the significance of Maori culture and traditions in *The Whale Rider*.

There was just one Question 9 response for this novel and it gained full marks. The response was assured and perceptive, covering a wide range of examples and included a very thoughtful and sensitive commentary.

Text: *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 10: Explore the character of An-mei Hsu in the novel.

Question 11: Discuss the theme of sacrifices that people have made in *The Joy Luck Club*.

Very few responses were seen for this novel, but those who did respond to these questions were successful in gaining a Level 3 mark or above.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 10: Explore the character of Lindo Jong in the novel.

Question 11: Discuss the theme of difficult childhoods in *The Joy Luck Club*.

There were no responses to these questions.

Text: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe

On the main paper, the questions were:

Question 12: 'Ezinma is a very significant character in the novel.' How far do you agree with this view?

Question 13: In what ways is the theme of honour important in *Things Fall Apart*?

There were a small number of responses to these questions, with most writing about Ezinma. As in previous series, responses were often very successful and gained marks in Levels 4 and 5. This is often a novel where evidence of the top two levels is seen. Even though there were few entries, performance of the questions was typical of previous performance.

On the R paper, the questions were:

Question 12: In what ways is the theme of power important in *Things Fall Apart*?

Question 13: Explore how the lives of Okonkwo and Nwoye are affected by Ikemefuna in the novel.

There were no responses to these questions.

In summary, and as mentioned in previous series, when responding to Section C, candidates should remember to:

- focus on the question
- avoid narrative retelling of the events in the novel
- provide a range of examples from their chosen text – remember that as this is a closed book examination, examples need not be quotations but examples of events or episodes within the novel
- prove to the examiner their knowledge of the text – do not assume the examiner knows everything
- comment on contextual points and try to relate these to the points being made
- avoid dealing with context separately. Do not write a page of historical background, but link all contextual points with an example from the novel and in relation to the question being answered
- when using film versions, which are most valuable teaching aids, remind candidates that not all scenes in a film appear in the novel that they are studying and that their responses must be based on the novel and not the film version.

Conclusion

Once again, the papers are always a pleasure to mark and the responses have, once again, been very enjoyable to read.

Centres should be congratulated on preparing their candidates for the examination. As always, we very much hope that you will continue to deliver this specification and that you and your students are delighted with results.

Do look at our website for more details about the Summer 2020 examinations and for the latest COVID-19 updates.

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